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Testimony in Support of HB 2302

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Good morning Chairman Kerschen and members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2302. This dedication of state sales tax revenue to the State Water Plan Fund and would mark a historic commitment to water in Kansas. Kansas faces severe problems with declining groundwater in the west and silted reservoirs in the east, yet for years, we have lagged behind neighboring states, who invest hundreds of millions of dollars each year in water. Given the current drought, the need to support water programs and projects is evident. HB 2302 also brings this new funding online in a responsible manner.

Based on the findings of the 2016 Blue Ribbon Task Force, the House Water Committee crafted a plan that would dedicate sales tax funds to the State Water Plan Fund in order to develop a long-term plan to deal with Kansas' needs. Including annual user fees, the total amount of funding available will increase from \$22 million to \$68 million. However, it is important to implement such a large increase in funding in a responsible manner. Along with a five-year sunset on the dedicated sales tax, the bill identifies key priorities for the Kansas Water Office to consider when developing funding recommendations. This includes funding for key technical staff positions at state agencies, including engineers, seeking out non-profit matching funds, and encouraging cooperation and shared use of funds between existing agencies.

Further, \$20 million of the new funds will be dedicated to a technical assistance fund (\$5 million) and a project fund (\$15) that enable municipalities and water districts to develop plans for improving water related infrastructure, provide matching grant funding, and provide loan and grant assistance for aging infrastructure and key projects. Special criteria were also developed to prioritize funding for the communities that currently have the most difficulty accessing funding and technical support. These funds will be critical in leveraging federal funding that is currently not captured by the state.

Water policy requires long-term commitments and if we fail to make those commitments now, some options will not be available in the future or will be much more expensive to undertake. There are parts of the Ogallala Aquifer that have practically exhausted their useable supply of water and reservoirs with less than half of their original capacity remaining. There are also many positive signs, including the development of local enhancement management areas, new dredging techniques, growing awareness, and technological advancements.

Please also consider that nearly 40 proponents supported the bill, which then passed committee unanimously, and passed the House 119-3. I encourage you to support HB 2302 and support the work of all Kansans to provide a safe and sustainable supply of water long into the future, a future that must start today.